



OBSERVER COVERAGE FACT SHEET



Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, all Category I or II fishery participants (those with a frequent or occasional level of take) must carry an observer on fishing trips when requested to do so by NMFS or by a designated contractor providing observer services to NMFS, and meet the United States Coast Guard safety requirements. NMFS may also request that Category III fishing participants (those with rare or unknown takes of marine mammals) carry an observer on a voluntary basis.

Observer programs are a vital component of the fishery management process because they are one of the best ways to gather current data on the status of marine fisheries.



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As a fishery participant, your cooperation is important to help NMFS collect the most complete, unbiased, and relevant data possible. Good data prevents over-regulation and ensures the sustainability of our fisheries and the conservation of protected species populations.



USGS

NMFS Uses Observer Data to:

- Track the effectiveness of gear modifications
- Determine whether appropriate conservation measures are in place for commercial fisheries to reduce bycatch of marine mammals
- Identify new fishing patterns
- Identify ways for fishermen to fish more cleanly, thereby reducing bycatch and allowing for more fishing time

Observed Fisheries:

Category I Fisheries

- Northeast sink gillnet
- Mid-Atlantic gillnet
- Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico large pelagics longline



FWC

Category II Fisheries

- North Carolina inshore gillnet
- Northeast anchored float gillnet
- Northeast drift gillnet
- Southeast Atlantic gillnet
- Southeastern U.S. Atlantic shark gillnet
- Mid-Atlantic bottom trawl
- Northeast mid-water trawl (including pair trawl)
- Northeast bottom trawl
- Mid-Atlantic haul/beach seine
- Virginia pound net
- Mid-Atlantic mid-water trawl (including pair trawl)
- Mid-Atlantic Flynet
- Southeastern U.S. Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico shrimp trawl

Category III Fisheries

- Southeastern U.S. Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico shark bottom longline*

*Observer coverage in this fishery is mandated by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.



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For a complete list of ALL Category I, II, and III fisheries, visit:
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/interactions/lof/>

How Will You Know When You Have to Carry an Observer?



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Fishermen and fishing industry representatives will be notified whenever possible to provide advance notification to a fishery that observer coverage will be required. Fishermen may be selected for observer coverage either by letter, phone, or direct request by NMFS personnel, designated contractors, or by observers themselves.

If selected to carry an observer, a vessel may not engage in any Category I or II fishing operation unless an observer is on board.

What are My Responsibilities When Carrying an Observer?

- Allowing the observer access to all areas of the vessel.
- Allowing the observer access to communications equipment and navigation equipment, when available on the vessel.
- Providing the observer with vessel locations by latitude and longitude, accurate to the minute or by loran coordinates.
- Allowing for the sampling, retention, and storage of marine mammal specimens and other protected species specimens, or target and non-target catch specimens, if adequate facilities are available and if feasible.
- Notifying the observer in a timely fashion when all commercial fishing operations are to begin and end.
- Providing accommodations and food to the observer equivalent to those provided to the crew.
- Allowing for the embarking and disembarking of the observer: ensuring that transfers of observers at sea are accomplished in a safe manner, via small boat or raft, during daylight hours as weather and sea conditions allow, and with the agreement of the observer(s) involved.
- Complying with other guidelines or regulations that NMFS may develop to ensure the effective deployment and use of observers.



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What are the Safety Requirements for Carrying an Observer?

1. Complying with the United States Coast Guard (USCG) safety requirements while at sea.
2. Obtaining a Commercial Fishery Vessel Safety Examination Decal by successfully completing a USCG safety examination. Safety decals are valid for two years. Safety examination are completed dockside at no cost by calling the USCG Marine Safety Office Dockside Examiners.
3. Allowing an observer, NMFS personnel, or designated observer service provider to visually inspect any safety or accommodation requirement if requested (50 CFR § 600.746(c)(2)).

Note: Vessels that do not have a current and valid safety decal are considered unsafe for purposes of carrying an observer. Vessels that are required and selected to carry an observer, but do not have the safety decal, are prohibited from fishing without observer coverage (50 CFR § 600.746(f)).

**For more information or questions regarding NMFS' observer coverage requirements, contact:
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